

Innovative development strategy of traditional handicrafts—Taking the horsetail embroidery technique of Shui ethnic minority in Sandu County as an example

Zhang Hengwei¹, Jin Zhaoyuan¹, Shao Tianbian², Shang Wanli¹

¹School of Ethnology and History, Guizhou Minzu University, Guiyang, Guizhou, China

²RDFZ Xishan School, Beijing, China

Abstract: Shui people's horsetail embroidery technique is a kind of embroidery craft which has been passed down for thousands of years and has unique folk traditional art skills. It is the masterpiece of the Shui people's fantasy and realistic art, and is also a precious art material for the study of Shui people's folk customs, totem worship and culture. Under the background of China's new era, to promote the innovative development of Shui people's horsetail embroidery, it is not only necessary to combine its characteristics and functions, to carry out creative protection, but also to promote its transformation of economic value. Through investigation, it is found that the Sandu Shui people's horsetail embroidery has unique cultural value, and most of the Shui women have mastered the craft of horsetail embroidery. However, its commercialization and industrialization are not high. There are too few leading enterprises and well-known brands. The low degree of industrialization, the lagging sales model, and the single way of publicity are the obstacles and causes of the development of Shui people's horsetail embroidery. Therefore, by improving the level of industrialization, joint development, optimizing sales models, and multi-faceted publicity, we can create a cultural business card with the characteristics of aquatic horsetail embroidery to help its innovative development.

Keywords: Sandu Shui People; Horsetail Embroidery Technique; Innovative Development Strategies

1. Introduction

Sandu County is the only autonomous county of the Shui people in China, which has rich Shui people culture and unique traditional handicrafts. Among them, the most representative is Horsetail Embroidery, which is known as "the living fossil of Chinese embroidery". The design of Shui people's horsetail embroidery is full of ethnic characteristics, such as flowers, birds, butterflies, plants and other themes, using a combination of fine mending and embroidery, outlining dynamic images with lines, bright colors and delicate textures fully demonstrates the unique charm of the culture of the Shui people.



Figure 1: a Shui woman is rubbing the horsetail

Sandu Shui people's horsetail embroidery conveys the unique Shui people culture and aesthetic concepts through the patterns and colors. The material used for its production is very unique, which is

made of horsetail hair. The core technique of its production is called "rubbing the horsetail" (as shown in Figure 1), which is to tie a horse's tail hair with a string and then roll it like a straw rope into a prefabricated string similar to a cello string. Then this line is placed on the outer outline of the embroidery to form a three-dimensional outline, and then it is filled with flat embroidery or knotting. This link is called "filling the heart". The characteristics of Shui people's horsetail Embroidery are mainly manifested in the light relief texture, and the finished horsetail embroidery looks like a colorful relief from afar, which is attributed to the techniques chosen by the working people. The themes and designs of the works usually come from the local natural landscape, folk traditions and history and culture of Sandu County. In addition, Shui people's horsetail embroidery is famous for its exquisite stitching, technique and compositional ability, which presents a smooth and delicate line effect that is both decorative and artistic.

2. The Current Situation of Its Inheritance

Governmental departments at all levels have attached great importance to the protection of Shui people's horsetail embroidery and introduced a number of targeted policies. As one of the better-developed intangible cultural heritages in Sandu County, Horsetail embroidery has been widely noticed and promoted. In order to protect it, Sandu County has carried out the following work for this purpose. Firstly, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Center keeps a record of the inheritors, and also organizes some skill training; Secondly, the government not only promotes the implementation of relevant policies and projects, such as the implementation of "on the implementation of women's special handmade industry plan"^[1], but also gives certain inheritance funds to the inheritors according to the actual situation; Thirdly, there is a special fund for the protection, which is mainly used for the training and recommendation of inheritors, while other departments in the county, such as the Industry and Information Department, the Human Resources and Social Affairs Department, the Women's Federation, the Labor Union, and the Handicapped Federation, will have certain support for the industrial investment, inheritance training, and the construction of bases of some traditional handicraft enterprises.

At present, there are two national-level inheritors, five provincial-level inheritors, twelve state-level inheritors and more than 200 county-level inheritors in Sandu County. Since 2008, the government has formulated the *Five-Year Development Plan for the Training of Folk Artists of Horsetail Embroidery in Sandu Shui Autonomous County*, established two Horsetail Embroidery Associations and four Horsetail Embroidery Training Centers in the places where the skills are centrally transmitted and selected the managers of private horsetail embroidery enterprises to participate in various kinds of training. In August, 2016, the trademark of "Weitaohua" was awarded the titles of Famous Trademark and Famous Brand Product of Guizhou Province. In January 2019, the "Horsetail Embroidery Inheritance Protection Exhibition Center" was built in Sandu County with the style of Shui people hammock building, and in November of the same year, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center of the county obtained the qualification of the "Shui People's Horsetail Embroidery" project protection unit, and constructed the ethnic cultural resources fusion area centered on Wanhu Shui People Village and Horsetail Embroidery Town of Xuehuahu, forming a number of experience study bases of Shui people intangible cultural heritage projects.

Most of the Shui women in Sandu County have mastered the handicraft of horsetail embroidery.^[2] During the research, every time the author went to a village, he would see embroiderers doing embroidery in front of their houses or under the trees, and in the conversation with villagers, it was concluded that the local elders attached great importance to the inheritance of horsetail embroidery, and some little girls began to follow the adults to learn how to rub the horsetail at the age of 4 or 5 years old. According to Mr. Pan, the president of Weitaohua Horsetail Embroidery Art Production Company, there are more than 600 embroiderers contracted by their companies. However, the commercialization and industrialization of horsetail embroidery in Sandu County is not high, such as the products (as shown in Figure 2) are basically embroidered products made by embroiderers, mainly back fans, scented bags, belts, shoes, and clothing, mainly used for their own living needs, and almost never traded; the company's commodities, including handbags, shoes, purses, hangings, decorations, pillows, notebooks, etc., are mainly sold through the government's contact with exhibitions to sell, while some companies will cooperate with some shoe factories or bags factories in Guangzhou and Shenzhen to sell their products. According to a staff of the Culture and Tourism Bureau, there are some orders and sales of local horsetail embroidery products, but only a few customers will buy them.



Figure 2: Shui people's Horsetail embroidery products

The main reason is that the leading enterprises in the horsetail embroidery industry in Sandu County are relatively few, and the driving and leading role of the entire horsetail embroidery industry is limited. According to a staff of the intangible Cultural Heritage Center, some enterprises in Sandu County have also cooperated closely with the French Letu Travel Agency, and in recent years, they have done some cultural and creative products with French companies, which are very popular in France. The year before last, the French Letu Travel Agency and a company made a wine packaging, about 20,000 packaging. Although some horsetail embroidery products of Sandu County have already had a certain market and influence at domestic and foreign market, for example, in recent years, the Sandu Weitaohua Horsetail Embroidery Artwork Production Co., Ltd. has participated in various large-scale folk handicrafts exhibitions, sales and performances and competitions at home and abroad. The company performed well in these events and received appreciation from many well-known personalities and artists both at home and abroad. However, although there are some horsetail embroidery enterprises that have achieved success in their development, most of them still hold outdated concepts of publicity, and they do not publicize enough to the outside world. They lack of experience in brand promotion, building and maintenance, and the market influence of these enterprises is far from enough.

3. The Development Dilemmas of the Sandu Shui People's Horsetail Embroidery

3.1. Low Degree of Industrialization

Horsetail embroidery has unique beauty and cultural connotation, and also has high economic value in today's society. Therefore, improving its industrialization level will drive the development of local income, realize the inheritance and innovation of horsetail embroidery, and help the high-quality development of ethnic areas. However, the low level of industrialization of horsetail embroidery in Sandu County is mainly manifested in the small scope of development, slow design and innovation, and difficult quality control, which makes it difficult to form an aggregation effect and play a driving role for other inheritors and the surrounding areas.

Firstly, the development scope of horsetail embroidery industry in Sandu County is small. Sandu County is located in the hinterland of Leigong Mountain, due to the geographic location of the relative inward, for a long time with the outside world communication and contact is small, the local people adapted to the life of self-sufficiency, for this skill of horsetail embroidery, mainly used to meet the needs of their own lives, seldom used for trade, only in a few cases people will go to the market to buy. According to local custom, when a woman gives birth to a child, the mother's family has to give her a back fan, and if she is too busy with other things to make a back fan, she has to buy one at the market. However, this is rarely the case because every family makes them and prepares them in advance. And horsetail embroidery products are overpriced due to labor, cost and other factors, coupled with the low level of local consumption, it is not a necessity of life, the high price of the product is difficult to meet the shopping needs of ordinary consumers. A staff of the relevant local department told the author that the costs of horsetail embroidery products are relatively high, and the price is not cheap. In the market, because of the price is too high, it can not be accepted by the market. The above situation reflects that the local market of horsetail embroidery products is very small and it is difficult to promote industrialized production.

Secondly, the design and innovation are slow. The inheritance method is mostly passed on from old women to young women or children by word of mouth, together with the fact that most of the young women go out to work and study, and most of those who have mastered this skill and produce it are middle-aged or old women, who do not have any innovative design concepts for their own embroidery

products. So the styles are relatively fixed, and they are usually embroidered shoes for women and children, backpacks, loincloths, satchels and so on, but it is difficult to attract the contemporary consumers who are the main consumers of today. Although some horsetail embroidery companies have launched some relatively new products, they have not jumped out of the traditional confines of the existing embroiderers, and the product range is too repetitive and homogenized, both in terms of product type and expression. At the same time, the majority of the products are the use of direct references to design, and the traditional pattern of horsetail embroidery "rigidly" added to other products, lacking in creativity.

Thirdly, the production period is long and the quality is not stable. A piece of hand-made horsetail embroidery backpack needs to go through 52 processes, which has a large demand for human resources. Even if skilled inheritors work day and night, they can't produce many products a year.^[3] If they don't have professional training, it's difficult to achieve a quantitative standard for the products, and it's harder to standardize its industrialization. Local enterprises generally have small orders and the orders are basically made by the inheritors themselves. When encountering batch orders, they need to ask those embroiders who have signed with the company to help. But the embroiders' technical levels are different, it is difficult to ensure the consistency of the product. Some embroiders' techniques are not mature enough to ensure the quality. And with the diversification of the market economy, the horsetail embroidery on the market is "half real and half fake". The reason why we must use horsetail is that the horsetail has a certain amount of grease, the thread wrapped up, you can let the embroidery to keep a long time. However, the production cost of horsetail is higher, some businesses use fishing line instead of the the horsetail. After embroidery, some lines will be discolored or faded, and its texture and touch are essentially different from products embroidered with horsetail.

3.2. Lagging sales mode

Sandu Shui people's horsetail embroidery products have their unique skills and cultural values. It is very popular in the market. However, due to the lag of the sales model, it hindered its development.

First of all, the small scale of operation makes it difficult to sell the products. At present, there are only a few companies in the market engaged in producing, making and selling. According to the statistics, there are 418 enterprises registered in Sandu County, including 128 limited liability companies, 262 individual industrial and commercial households, and 28 other types of enterprises. Among the 418 enterprises, 227 are in normal state, 189 are abnormal, and 2 are in other states.^[2] At the same time, according to the staff of the local Intangible Cultural Heritage Center, at present, there are only six horsetail embroidery cultural and creative enterprises in Sandu County with a slight scale. Small scale operations often present problems of professional management and business continuity, which pose challenges to sales activities and promotion. Small companies have a limited customer base and are concentrated on a small number of customers, and losing any one of them can have a significant impact on the company. Small companies do not have a professional sales team, lack of sales experience and skills, easy to lead to too long sales cycle or problems in the sales process. The products or services of small companies are similar to those of competitors, which makes them difficult to attract new customers, and homogenization has made it difficult for everyone. In addition, small-scale operations are difficult to cross over to foreign markets, intensifying local market competition.

Secondly, the narrow sales channels make it difficult to develop the market. The sales channels of the local enterprises are mainly through the offline way at present, and there is no online sales channel. Generally, there are two sales methods, one is to receive orders through trade fairs, which are contacted by the government or by themselves. The second is to establish offline exhibition centers and research bases, mainly concentrated in Wanhua Shui people village and Xuehuahu horsetail embroidery village, to develop the local market. The local experience center mainly receives groups of tourists, rarely receive individuals. The drawbacks of offline sales were evident during the epidemic, which hindered the opportunity for sales personnel to go out, so the number of orders received dropped sharply, and foreign orders can not continue to follow up due to the epidemic. A number of managers of horsetail embroidery enterprises also said that they had thought about opening up online sales channels and had set up a broadcast room, but because they did not understand the technology, coupled with the scarcity of e-commerce operating talents, insufficient inventory of goods, and higher operating costs, the opening of online sales channels was shelved, and the phone reservation business is currently accepted.

3.3. A Single Way and Means of Publicity

Due to technical and financial reasons, the current publicity method is relatively simple, mainly offline, and lacks the diversified publicity method of "Offline + Online".

Firstly, there are fewer online exhibitions and experiences of horsetail embroidery. The government strongly supports the publicity work of Horsetail embroidery, and organizes major cultural and tourism activities, such as the Lusheng Festival and the Half-City Marathon, and will do some exhibitions and experiences of horsetail embroidery in the activities. There is also contact with a variety of exhibitions to promote it to go out, such as participating the cultural fairs in Wuhan, Inner Mongolia, Shenzhen and other places. However, due to financial and technical reasons, no special promotional film was shot to promote horsetail embroidery.

Secondly, The way that inheritors promote horsetail embroidery is single. As far as enterprises are concerned, most of the inheritors are organizing some activities, special events, displays and other ways to promote spontaneously. In the digital context, many companies have adopted spontaneous ways to promote, such as organizing events, special presentations, and so on. Besides, digital forms such as cell phone APPs, videos and games have also accelerated the speed of the spread of intangible culture.^[4] However, because many horsetail embroidery enterprises lack diversified online publicity channels, some potentials remain untapped, resulting in horsetail embroidery not reaching a high level of popularity. Even the better-developed horsetail embroidery companies have not opened well-known online shopping stores such as Taobao and Jingdong. In addition, there are also shortcomings in the construction of self-media such as Tiktok, Kuaishou and wechat public accounts.

Thirdly, there is a lack of excavation of the horsetail embroidery connotation. The characteristics of horsetail embroidery come from the folklore, folk activities and psychology of Shui people, and the embroidery patterns contain very rich cultural information. These cultural messages are closely related to the long history and culture of Shui people, which has accumulated a thousand years of folk culture. In addition, Horsetail embroidery represents the common wish of people to pray for happiness. However, neither the local government nor the enterprises have fully explored the totem culture involving the Shui people, including the stories behind the patterns of flowers, birds, insects, beasts, auspicious clouds, etc., and there is a lack of organizing information in this regard.

4. Countermeasures to Promote the Innovation and Development of Sandu Shui People's Horsetail Embroidery Industry

The industrialization of horsetail embroidery can realize the inheritance and innovation of traditional skills and promote the two-way role of horsetail embroidery protection and economic development.^[5] To achieve the innovative development of horsetail embroidery, we need to do a good job in the integration and development of "Horsetail Embroidery +", so that horsetail embroidery can release more cultural value and economic value.

4.1. Keep the Right and Innovative Development, and Improve the Industrialization Level

First of all, it is necessary to continue to expand the market of horsetail embroidery and support the cultural products of horsetail embroidery to go out. At present, the local market demand is small, and supply is often greater than demand. Therefore, whether it is the government, enterprises or small industrial workshops, they should actively explore the market and expand external demand. On the one hand, the government investment promotion department should actively attract investment, continue to actively promote enterprises to participate in various exhibitions, open up the outside market, win a large number of orders, and improve the number of export sales of horsetail embroidery in order to achieve higher quality development. On the other hand, local government through the development of tourism, enriching the connotation of local people culture and other ways to attract the flow of people. The cultural and tourism integration method of "Horsetail Embroidery + Tourism" is used to increase the demand of the local market and promote the expansion of the market scope of the local horsetail embroidery industry.

Secondly, enrich the form of products, develop high-end products and popularized products to meet the needs of different consumer groups. In the face of different consumer groups, different price levels, different forms and different carriers of product forms should be set. One is to carry out customized business with enterprises and individuals. According to the consumer's personal preferences to put forward the product requirements, and the manufacturers provide consumers with private services. The

cultural elements extracted from horsetail embroidery are directly used in various products, such as custom brooches, handkerchiefs and other accessories. Second, on the basis of the original to make reconstruction derivative, develop popular products, to achieve transformation and innovation development. Some elements are extracted from horsetail embroidery culture, combined with modern popular design elements, and the traditional pattern is re-created, so as to obtain new products. The key is to convey the cultural connotation behind traditional culture. Elements such as shape, pattern, color and composition of traditional horsetail embroidery are extracted and applied to different carriers. For example, try to make the patterns of fish, butterflies, plants and flowers embroidered in horsetail into figurative toys; Make good use of traditional colors and apply them to different carriers such as notebooks and wrapping paper; Learn from the cross-stitch product experience, make a good horsetail and embroidered cloth, customers can buy home and start to try to make, participate in personal experience. The above way on the one hand extracts and re-creates the unique and meaningful culture, on the other reduces the production cost, promotes the popularization of horsetail embroidery products, and then expands the industrial scope.

Third, through the joint cooperation of multiple majors, to complement the shortcomings of innovative design. The lack of creative and technical talents is the main cause of the lack of creativity, single form and expired aesthetic of horsetail embroidery products. The outsourcing company can fill the shortcomings of the lack of professional personnel and insufficient production level of the horsetail embroidery company. Therefore, enterprises are encouraged to actively establish cooperative relations with the outside world. Through cooperation in design, we can give play to our own advantages and achieve win-win development. We develop cultural products with unique local people's characteristics and contemporary fashion elements. We make horsetail embroidery products into people's lives, enrich people's lives.

Finally, promote the integration of the industrial chain to ensure product quality. To integrate and optimize the production, sales, quality management and other links, we need to start from many aspects such as materials, technology, inspection, technology and so on to ensure the production quality of the product and the final market competitiveness. The enterprise must choose high-quality, in line with the standards of horsetail raw materials; The process of making horsetail embroidery is very critical, and each step must be fine and rigorous to ensure that every detail is handled in place; In the production process, we need to check the quality of each link to ensure that the product meets the expected requirements; The production of horsetail embroidery products needs experienced embroidery women to complete, they have rich skills and experience, can ensure the quality of products. At the same time, relevant functional departments should do a good job in market supervision and management to ensure the standardized operation of the market.

4.2. Work Together to Develop and Optimize the Sales Model

One is to integrate resources and build a promotion and sales platform. The traditional small-scale production and management mode has fallen behind and cannot meet the growing demand of the handicraft market, and needs to be replaced with large-scale production and management. The enterprise is led by the government and assisted by leading enterprises to integrate resources in the region, build a production and sales platform for information sharing and win-win cooperation, so as to optimize the sales process, reduce the sales cycle, and improve the brand awareness of horsetail embroidery.

Second, expand sales channels and build integrated development markets. First of all, the establishment of modern life and consumption habits of "Online and Offline" integrated sales channels. It is necessary for the government to actively guide enterprises to change their ideas and take various measures to broaden the sales channels. Specific measures include the introduction of business operation talents, entering the e-commerce platform, and expanding the sales channel from a single offline way to the brand's official website, social platforms (such as Weibo, wechat, etc.), search engines (such as Baidu) and mobile video (such as Tiktok). A variety of new media sales methods have become an inevitable choice to promote the revitalization of horsetail embroidery, and it is also easier for consumers to accept. What's more, expand the scope of customers of cultural experience projects and enhance the vitality of "Experiential" consumption. It will build museums and intangible cultural heritage experience centers as platforms, improve supporting facilities for cultural, production and business sites in surrounding areas, and form comprehensive sites for production, consumption and tourism. Develop "Parent-Child Experience", "Couple Experience" and other projects to maximize the interaction between artisans and consumers. In the process of experience, people acquire the knowledge contained in cultural and creative products, feel the moisture and enlightenment of emotions and values, and make horsetail embroidery truly sustainable inheritance and development.

5. Conclusions

First of all, continue to explore a variety of offline channels to achieve cross-border integration and development of horsetail embroidery. One is to establish offline stores in cities or tourist attractions to display horsetail embroidery products, while providing quality services to attract customers to buy; The Second is to continue to cooperate with characteristic towns and cultural industry parks, make use of the uniqueness of horsetail embroidery products, set up intangible cultural heritage products stores and promote intangible cultural heritage products to the majority of tourists; The Third is to continue to participate in all kinds of exhibitions, cultural fairs and tourism exhibitions, display horsetail embroidery products, so that more people understand and know horsetail embroidery products. Let horsetail embroidery go out of the country, to the world; The fourth is to cooperate with travel companies. Sell horsetail embroidery products or their derivative products as tourist souvenirs. Set up horsetail embroidery product experience points in the tour route to enhance tourists' awareness and interest in the product; The Fifth is to cooperate with catering enterprises.^[6] Use horsetail embroidery products as decorations or complimentary items in restaurants to increase publicity and exposure.

Secondly, new technologies are used to create the protection and development mode of "Internet + Horsetail Embroidery". On the one hand, we should strengthen cooperation with e-commerce and we-media platforms. Put horsetail embroidery products on well-known e-commerce platforms for sales and publicity, such as Taobao, Jingdong, etc. Through these platforms, the products can be promoted to all parts of the country, and the exposure and visibility of the products can be improved. On the other hand, through VR technology, people can feel the cultural charm of horsetail embroidery immersive, so as to better understand, inherit and carry forward traditional culture. One is to establish a VR cultural relic museum. VR technology is used to establish a virtual cultural relic museum, and through digital technology means, the Shui people cultural relics, architecture, Shui books, horsetail embroidery, traditional festivals and other elements are digitized. We construct a comprehensive and multi-dimensional virtual Shui ethnic minority museum and allow visitors to visit heritage exhibitions without leaving their homes, while also getting more interactive experiences; The second is the establishment of VR intangible cultural experience museum. The technology of horsetail embroidery is integrated into the VR display, so that the audience can learn and experience the culture of horsetail embroidery in a virtual environment.^[7] For example, you can learn crafts such as horsetail rubbing and heart filling through VR technology, and you can also enjoy performance forms such as clothing runway shows and embroidery competitions in virtual scenes. The third is to create VR cultural tourism. VR technology is used to create virtual tourist attractions, so that visitors can visit the characteristic ethnic villages and scenic spots of Sandu County in the virtual environment, so as to better understand the traditional culture of Shui people; The fourth is to develop VR intangible cultural heritage education, and integrate intangible culture into school education through VR technology, so that students can learn and experience traditional Shui people culture such as horsetail embroidery culture in a virtual environment, and improve their awareness and interest in traditional culture.

Finally, using narrative technique to innovate the way of cultural experience. By telling a beautiful story, you can arouse the emotional resonance of users, so as to build trust and goodwill with the product. The pattern of horsetail embroidery is closely related to some folk legends, stories and ancient songs of the Shui people. By fully exploring the cultural connotation and cultural stories behind these elements, we can enhance the interest and cultural value of cultural and creative products. In the life of Shui people, there are many stories, including common life experience and historical allusions. Building products that tell these stories well can evoke a sense of "deja vu" or "that's how it was." Through products to promote cultural communication, to achieve the innovative development of Sandu horsetail embroidery intangible cultural heritage. Project

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